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SUBJECT: ABU MAZEN EXPLAINS GOLDSSTONE DECISION DURING NEW FRC'S FIRST OFFICIAL MEETING

REF: JERUSALEM 1450

Classified By: CG Daniel Rubinstein, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶11. (C) Summary. President Mahmud Abbas (Abu Mazen) took personal responsibility for the PA's handling of the Goldstone report during an October 16 speech to the Fatah Revolutionary Council (FRC), and emphasized that he had acted at all times with the Palestinians' best interests in mind. He also said that he would call for elections in January 2010. The FRC endorsed Abbas's decision not to resume negotiations until Israel fulfills its Roadmap obligations. The FRC also elected Deputy Interior Minister and FRC member Amin Maqbul as its Secretary General, and filled other key internal leadership positions. Newly-elected FRC member Sabri Saidam told PolChief prior to the FRC meeting that the new FRC hopes to play a more active role in Fatah by "monitoring" the Fatah Central Committee (FCC) and giving input on policy. However, FCC members -- including Abbas himself -- are skeptical that the FRC will do so. End summary.

ABBAS'S ACCEPTS RESPONSIBILITY FOR GOLDSSTONE CONTROVERSY IN SPEECH AT THE FRC

¶12. (U) In a speech at the opening session of the recently-elected FRC's first meeting on October 16, Abu Mazen personally accepted responsibility for the PA's handling of the Goldstone report. According to press reports, Abu Mazen explained his initial decision to support deferring discussion of the report as an effort to compromise between Arab and Western proposals. He said he was quick to resubmit the report for discussion when that tactic did not work. Abu Mazen rejected claims that he had acted "treasonously," saying that he welcomed the report as soon as it was released, but that he wanted to take practical action and avoid fruitless hype. Abu Mazen also reportedly told the FRC that on October 25, he intends to call for elections in January 2010, based on Hamas's refusal to sign the Egyptian-proposed reconciliation document. The FRC endorsed a resolution supporting Abu Mazen's decision not to resume negotiations until Israel meets its Roadmap obligations.

FRC ELECTS INTERNAL LEADERSHIP, FILLS MEMBERSHIP RANKS

¶13. (SBU) The FRC meeting continued through October 19, conducting internal elections and administrative tasks. The FRC elected veteran West Bank Fatah leader Amin Maqbul as Secretary General, and FRC members Sabri Saidam and Amal Hamad as the first and second deputies, respectively. According to Fatah contacts, leadership of 12 internal committees was beginning to emerge on October 19. The FRC confirmed Abu Mazen's selection of Zakaria al-Agha and Sakhir Bsaysso to fill two of the final three FCC seats, and endorsed a list of 19 additional FRC members that was submitted by the

FCC. Note: The August Fatah Congress elected 81 FRC members, leaving 24 positions to be filled by the FCC in coordination with the FRC. End note. The FRC also submitted a recommendation to the FCC to create a new Fatah body, the "General Conference," composed of the FCC, the FRC, and dozens of as-yet-undetermined Fatah leaders, to meet in emergency sessions to make policy.

NEW FRC DEPUTY HOPES FRC WILL PLAY A LARGER ROLE

¶4. (C) Newly-elected FRC member Sabri Saidam told PolChief in mid-October (before the FRC meeting) that he hopes the FRC will meet regularly and begin playing an active role in Fatah. The Fatah charter establishes the FRC as "the highest layer of command in Fatah, when it is in session," Saidam said. The new FRC will "monitor" the FCC, give guidance on Fatah policy, and establish a unified media message for the party, he said, adding that the FRC has the authority to "impeach Fatah leaders," thereby exerting greater control. He said Fatah needs to regain Palestinians' trust and prove its relevance after Hamas's 2006 electoral victory. "We need to convince the people that Fatah is an active party with an agenda." He warned, however, that he will "wait to see action" before judging the success of the new FRC.

COMMENT

¶5. (S) Although some members appear eager for the FRC to play a greater role, the FCC remains Fatah's dominant executive arm. Abu Mazen was dismissive of the FRC's

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relevance in an October 18 meeting with the Consul General, saying that members "just wanted a chance to appear on television, to impress their wives." The FRC's primary relevance to USG interests in the past has been its role as a training ground for up-and-coming Fatah leaders. The FRC will have to overcome significant inertia -- and opposition by FCC members -- if it wants to play a more active role.

RUBINSTEIN